

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

April 26, 2013

LISA campus going all out to ease traffic (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Two privately hired traffic officers stood outside LISA Academy Thursday afternoon, directing parents away from private drives and keeping cars from obstructing traffic.

The measure along with seven other changes to the Little Rock charter school's traffic plan for student pickup were put into effect earlier this school year to ease some of the concerns about traffic on Corporate Hill Drive and other neighboring roads caused by an increased student enrollment.

But regardless of whether the traffic measures work, the increased enrollment is in violation of a condition the Little Rock Planning Commission placed on the school in 2011. The school has filed an appeal to the Little Rock Board of Directors, which will vote May 7 on whether to schedule a public hearing for May 21.

The Planning Commission capped the school's enrollment at 600 in 2011 after a traffic study of after-school pickup patterns. The school sought and won approval in April 2012 from the state Board of Education to increase its enrollment to 800 students.

The school began accepting applications, taking students based on a lottery from its waiting list. As of this week, the school's enrollment was at 790, putting the school's administration in violation of the commission's cap, city Planning Department staff members said.

"If we had realized we needed to come back to the city before we went to the state Board [of Education], we definitely would have done that," said Cuneyt Akdemir, the principal of the LISA Academy's high school program. "It was a mistake, and when we realized, we came to the commission and worked with city staff to deal with the traffic concerns and be good neighbors."

The enrollment cap isn't a typical issue for schools, but because LISA Academy had to get a conditional-use zoning designation to locate in the office park, the Planning Commission had more leeway to set rules to ease the school's impact on existing neighbors and uses.

The Planning Commission voted against allowing the enrollment increase in March.

"We were blindsided," Akdemir said. "We thought we would get approval because we had worked with city staff to decrease the traffic concerns, and a lot of the problems had been successfully resolved."

City Attorney Tom Carpenter said that if the enrollment increase is not granted as part of the school's conditional zoning, the school will have to reduce its enrollment to 600 or find a different location.

Jess Askew III, an attorney for the school, said he doubts that the Board of Directors will allow the traffic issue to get that far.

"As a community and as people, we're better than that," he said. "I don't think the city will risk the education of 200 kids over complaints from two neighbors. I'm not saying the city will steamroll those people, but there is a balance of interests that has to take place."

City officials and Planning Department staff said almost all of the complaints, which were the reason the city checked on the school's enrollment numbers, were about traffic and the problems it causes for nearby businesses.

Akdemir and other school officials said they have put new measures in place, such as a staggered dismissal time that releases middle school and high school students 25 minutes apart, having most after-school traffic enter the site via Executive Court to free up Corporate Hill Drive - the main access road for many of the area businesses.

The school, which enrolls students in sixth-through-12th grades, is housed in two buildings on Corporate Hill Drive, which runs south off West Markham Street, near the intersection of Interstates 430 and 630.

LISA Academy recruited all administrative staff members, from the principals to the superintendent, to help direct and keep traffic orderly when middle school and high school students leave for the day. They also require parents who arrive early to circle around the office park and return to the end of the line.

Nat Banihatti, the city's traffic systems manager, said the school's plan has helped, but no system is perfect.

"It has made a significant improvement in the traffic," he said. "A lot of teachers and staff are coming out to direct traffic along with two officers. If they continue what they are doing, it should work, but there is no guarantee that it will solve things forever. If a teacher is out, or there is some outside circumstance, it may get worse. It's a delicate balancing act when you deal with traffic."

Banihatti said city staff had been at the school almost every day for four weeks to observe the new traffic measures and take stock of their effectiveness.

Askew said he hopes the Board of Directors will consider the input from the Planning Department staff, which recommended approval of the increase in enrollment. If the board denies the school's request, he said the school will submit to the Planning Commission its newest traffic plan, which will stagger release times by 50 minutes.

That plan was created in April, but the school did not implement it because staff members didn't want to throw a wrench in student schedules or tinker with the schedule of the school day.

"The current traffic initiatives have helped a great deal in alleviating the issues that were a concern to neighbors," Askew said. "This newest plan will help immensely more than that. Our hope is that the board will consider the situation as it stands rather than how it was on the first day or the first week of school. This new plan will suit everybody and show the school's effort to be a considerate neighbor."

Badgett school, idle near airport, is put up for sale (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

The Little Rock School District's Badgett Elementary School building at 4900 Pecan Ave., near the Bill and Hillary Clinton National Airport/Adams Field, is now for sale.

School Board members declared the now-vacant property surplus and available to buyers at a meeting Thursday in which they tabled for one month a decision on a new five-year contract with the First Student Inc., the company that provides school bus service for the district.

The Badgett school building has been vacant since December when the Felder Learning Academy alternative-school program was moved across town to the Hamilton Learning Academy campus, 3301 S. Bryant St.

The 28,012-square-foot building sits on 10 acres. It was built in 1962 by the Pulaski County Special School District but was acquired by the Little Rock district more than a dozen years ago.

Prior to its housing the alternative school, Badgett was used by the district as a traditional elementary school and a conversion charter school. The district also used it to house pupils from Wakefield Elementary when that school had to be rebuilt after a June 2002 fire destroyed it.

School Board members delayed action on a new contract with the First Student school bus transportation company at board President Dianne Curry's request.

Curry said she wanted to review results from a survey of principals and the bus coordinators at each campus regarding the company's service under the existing contract. An earlier survey went only to the principals at the schools, and fewer than half of them returned the questionnaire.

The company provides school bus service for about 15,000 district students on about 220 buses, for which the district pays nearly \$11 million a year. The company provides buses for regular routes, magnet school routes and majority-to-minority interdistrict student transfer routes. The district provides its own bus service for special-needs students.

The proposed 2013-2018 contract includes no increase in costs for the initial year and 2 percent increases in each of the following years. Among the provisions included in the 50-page contract proposal is one that specifies that the pre-employment criminal and sexual-offender background checks to be conducted. Another provision requires digital camera and audio systems to be installed in the first year on about 100 buses that do not already have that feature.

The Little Rock district has employed a school bus transportation system since 1995 when Laidlaw Education Services was selected to provide the service. First Student, a Cincinnati company, later acquired Laidlaw.

Also Thursday, the board approved the creation of a vendor-specialist position, a job that is meant to assist the district in increasing the amount of district business that is done with women business owners and business owners who are members of minority groups. The board recently established goals of doing 30 percent of its business with companies whose owners are in those categories.

School District Oblivious to Charges Against 19-yr-old for Having Sex with 14-yr-old on Campus (KARK, Channel 4)

Video available at http://arkansasmatters.com/fulltext?nxd_id=657212

Gurdon, AR - A former 19-year-old Gurdon High School student faces charges of sexual indecency with a child.

Deputies arrested the suspect in the case Thursday (4/25) evening.

In an arrest warrant filed April 13 in Clark County, a 14-yr-old girl claims she and the 19-yr-old had sex in the band hall bathroom while skipping class.

This was all news to Superintendent of the Gurdon Public School District, Allen Blackwell.

"I heard that a person had been charged on Facebook," he explained.

Blackwell says his office has not been notified of anything related to an incident like this.

Parents of students in the high school wonder how the school district would let this slip by without them finding out.

"The school always knows something. They just try to keep it under cover," remarked Latasha Accor. "I got four kids in the district and I want to know what's going on."

Blackwell feels just as in the dark.

"As a parent myself and having a daughter, something like this I would be very concerned as well," he said. "It would have been nice had we been notified that these criminal charges had been coming."

Blackwell insists nothing was ever brought forward to them regarding a sexual encounter.

"And to be honest with you we would want everybody to know that this has happened and these are the actions we've taken."

Blackwell says the school district disciplined those same two students for skipping together. The girl was only given a warning while the 19-yr-old was suspended and never returned to school.

Children's author featured at Greenbrier event (Log Cabin Democrat)

GREENBRIER — The second annual Greenbrier School District Family Literacy night featured American writer Kimberly Willis Holt, who has many honors for her children's literature. Born in Florida to a U.S. Navy Chief, she lived in France, Guam, Louisiana and now Texas. Her navy brat experiences are reflected in her Piper Reed series of six books. "When Zachary Beaver Came to Town" won the 1999 U.S. National Book Award for Young People's Literature. "My Louisiana Sky" was her first book published in 1998. Author of sixteen best-selling books, she admitted to her enthusiastic young audience that she day-dreamed a lot in school instead of listening to her teachers.

Holt said, "I still remember what it's like to be twelve years old. "My books have 'crumbs' of my life gleaned from moving around a lot with my military family." She admits to being a slow reader and a day-dreamer in school and did not start seriously writing until in her mid-thirties. From a southern family of story-tellers, she was inspired by various teachers along the way who gave encouragement. She has proven that the encouragement from those teachers lasts a life-time.

Holt reminded her listeners that most of her crumbs of life were often inspired by what happened around food. She said, "Writing inspiration can be as simple as that. It's the revisions that can sometimes take years of hard work." She started everyone in the audience writing by asking them to just put a noun and then a verb on paper. Many started with a food. Pretty soon, many youngsters took the microphone to read the paragraphs they had written.

A tail-gate party with gigantic hot dogs and hamburgers and all the trimmings preceded her presentation in Greenbrier's Fine Arts Building. Woodmen of The World and First Security Bank provided the great cook-out which got everyone in the mood to think about food in their writing.

Erin Shaw, Librarian at Greenbrier Middle School, met Holt by chance on an airplane, out of which came this delightful presentation. The joint efforts of the Librarians from all six schools made for a terrific family party, followed by three days of student writing work-shops in the various schools. In addition to the librarians' personal contributions, further funding was provided by the Arkansas Humanities Council and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

Forest Park Elementary PTA Raises \$300,000+ for New Athletic Complex (KLRT, Fox 16)

LITTLE ROCK, AR (News Release) - The Forest Park Elementary School Parent Teachers Association, along with Interim Superintendent Marvin Burton, announced today that the organization has raised enough funds to begin construction on a multi-use athletic complex for the school. However, the PTA still needs to raise \$20,000 by May 3 to fully fund all phases of the project, which include an all-weather athletic pavilion, jogging track and synthetic turf field. As a nationally acclaimed Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education, Forest Park Elementary is celebrating its centennial year and currently serves 450 students.

The project will be named the Forest Park Centennial Athletic Pavilion and will be the largest gift on record ever donated to LRSD by a school PTA. Nabholz Construction is scheduled to begin construction on June 7, the day after the current school year is completed, and it is scheduled to be completed by the start of the 2013-2014 school year.

"Forest Park Elementary is 100 years old. This is our birthday present to the school district and to the Forest Park children for generations to come. If you attended Forest Park or know someone who attended Forest Park and you want to purchase an engraved brick or make a tax-deductible contribution before next Friday, May 3, you can help us raise the remaining \$20,000 needed to complete the project," said Forest Park PTA Fundraising Chair Peyton Woodyard. "We appreciate your help and support."

To help raise the remaining \$20,000, please send an email to forestpark100@gmail or call the Fundraising Chairperson at (501) 960-0539 for more information. Donations can be sent to Forest Park PTA at P.O. Box 7602, Little Rock, Arkansas 72217.

The multi-use athletic pavilion is a much-needed improvement to the school campus. Currently, Forest Park doesn't have a gymnasium or covered activity area. This addition to the campus will provide an appropriate space for physical education as well as protect children from the weather elements throughout the year. In addition, it will provide a safe and secure outdoor place for children who are enrolled in the Little Rock School District's after-school CARE program and serve as an outdoor classroom.

"I am very thankful and proud of our PTA for leading the efforts on such a monumental project," said Forest Park Elementary Principal Theresa Ketcher. "It is only fitting that a structure of this scale will be built and completed during Forest Park Elementary's Centennial Year."

In early 2012, the Forest Park PTA identified the need to increase physical activity on campus and approached the Little Rock School District about the plans for an athletic pavilion. After unanimous approval by the Little Rock School District Board this past September, the PTA launched a fundraising effort in conjunction with its Centennial.

"We are very appreciative and grateful for the overwhelming support of the Little Rock School District and the local community," said Forest Park PTA President Jennifer Ronnel. "This project will help increase physical activity on campus and improve and enrich the overall educational experience for children for decades to come."

Since September 2012, over \$300,000 has been raised and the PTA is looking to raise another \$20,000 by May 3 to fully fund the project. The PTA's primary fundraiser, personalized engraved bricks, will make up the seating, walls and columns throughout the athletic pavilion. There are different sized bricks for different funding levels.

The Forest Park PTA in particular would like to thank Cromwell Architects for donating all architectural services for this project and Nabholz Construction, Staley Electric, Ketcher Roofing and Arkansas Fence and Guardrail for their generous contributions in reducing the overall costs for construction.

General Session Featured Good Cooperation, Column by State Senator Robert Thompson (Clay County Democrat)

Although much about the 2013 legislative session was new and different, it was like previous sessions in the long hours and hectic pace at which legislators worked to finish business on difficult and challenging issues.

The 89th General Assembly was the first in 138 years that had a Republican majority. Another innovation in the 2013 session was how legislators of both political parties used new technology. With lap tops and smart phones, senators kept in constant touch with constituents and colleagues, even while they were in session in the Senate chamber.

This year, when senators presented legislation to the body they often brought a hand-held computer so they could reference the bill and ancillary material such as fiscal impact statements and position papers.

However, the Senate is a conservative body that is slow to relinquish old habits, and many senators still carried a stack of paperwork to the front of the chamber when it was their turn to present legislation.

Another legislative tradition remained intact - the difficult decisions were made in the final hours on funding of education and health care. The most time consuming duty for legislator is writing budgets, and in the 2013 session the most difficult budget issue was whether to fund an expansion in health coverage for about 250,000 working adults.

The legislature approved the "private option" health plan with 75 percent majorities in both the Senate and House. It's called the "private option" because it takes Medicaid dollars and uses them to purchase private health insurance for people whose yearly income is less than 138 percent of the federal poverty level.

The goal was to not simply expand a government program, as the federal government had initially directed, but instead to provide health coverage through the private sector and thus allow the free market to hold down costs.

The Senate also approved a package of tax cut bills that will save Arkansas taxpayers more than \$150 million a year when they take full effect. They include reductions in state individual income taxes, capital gains taxes and sales taxes on energy used by manufacturers, farmers and poultry growers.

Arkansans in the military will not have to pay income taxes on their service pay, saving them more than \$7 million a year. Volunteer firefighters who buy their own equipment or have it damaged in the course of duty will qualify for income tax deductions.

The legislature created a revolving loan fund for charter schools to build or renovate facilities. A new school choice law was enacted, replacing the one that was stricken by a federal judge last year. Public school will get a two percent increase in state foundation aid.

A package of election laws were enacted to ensure more transparency and accountability in the counting of ballots, including legislation requiring voters to present a government-issued photo ID to get a ballot.

Numerous laws were enacted to protect Second Amendment rights, such as legislation protecting the privacy of concealed carry permit holders from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act. Another new law allows churches the choice of whether to allow their members with concealed carry permits to bring firearms into church.

Also, this year's session will be remembered for the number of pro-life bills approved, including legislation prohibiting abortions after 12 weeks of the physician can discern a heartbeat.

NBA legend talks education (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

HOT SPRINGS - Kareem Abdul-Jabbar spoke to ninth-graders from across Garland County about education and opportunities Thursday as part of the Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences, and the Arts Foundation's Open Book Celebration.

"Knowledge is power," Abdul-Jabbar said at Hot Springs High School. "It is the key to everything that we are talking about."

Abdul-Jabbar, best known for his accomplishments in the NBA, is the league's all-time leading scorer, six-time MVP and a member of six championship teams. He is an advocate for science, technology, engineering and math education.

"I am really impressed with what Arkansas has done in terms of setting up a school that encourages kids in science, math and the arts," Abdul-Jabbar said later. "Wow - that is really great. It gets kids focusing at the right time in their lives - when they are still in high school and starting to figure things out."

"This enables them to really get a better idea of what they want to do with their lives. So it is really going to have positive results over the long term. I commend the state of Arkansas for looking ahead like that."

Abdul-Jabbar spoke to approximately 1,250 students Thursday morning in Hot Springs. He also spoke later in the day during the Open Book Celebration in Little Rock advocating the school's education and opportunities.

"Every state should have a school like the Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences, and the Arts," Abdul-Jabbar said to the students. "It is a wonderful effort that the state has made to give you such a wonderful opportunity."

Abdul-Jabbar said there were many professions that students can find that utilize information learned from math and science education. He spoke about future issues of food production and energy that industries will face.

Abdul-Jabbar said too many young people only see opportunities in entertainment and sports.

“So many of them seem to feel it is the one way they can make it,” Abdul-Jabbar said. “It is a big world out there and I encourage all of you to explore it.”

Abdul-Jabbar said afterward that he relishes the opportunity to influence young people’s lives.

“I think I am fortunate to have the opportunity to talk to kids and have them listen,” Abdul-Jabbar said. “Kids don’t always listen. If I am credible and have a message that resonates with them, I think it will enable them to make some good choices and do the things that they want to do with their lives.”

He also said that speaking to students enables him to give back. He credits those in his life and his mentors for enabling him to achieve what he has.

“I think it is very important to get the message out to the kids that their future is all about how well they educate themselves and getting them to figure out what they want to do,” Abdul-Jabbar said. “And science, technology, engineering and math are really key subjects in that effort.

“Hopefully, when we get the message across that science, technology, engineering and math will hold the lion’s share of jobs in the 21st century, kids can figure out what they want to do and make the appropriate adjustments to seek out those things that will enable them to live the life that they want to live.”

Abdul-Jabbar also took questions from the students, touching on his inspiration to write, acting, Bruce Lee, and his playing career. He said Jackie Robinson inspired him and he wanted to play basketball from the time he was in grade school.

Abdul-Jabbar said he was inspired earlier in life by his neighborhood in Harlem in New York City. He said he plans to write more books in the future, but his current focus is on children’s books. He said he wants to encourage kids to pursue math and science interests.

Abdul-Jabbar recently won an NAACP Image award for “Best Children’s Book” for *What Color is My World? - The Lost History of African-American Inventors*.

The NBA legend answered that the highlight of his career was being a part of the 1985 NBA championship Los Angeles Lakers team that defeated the Boston Celtics in the finals. He was also asked about his famous “sky hook” shot.

“When I started playing basketball, that was the only shot I could take that wouldn’t get smashed back in my face.”

Governor's appointments (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Gov. Mike Beebe announced the following appointments to boards and commissions Wednesday:

Greg Revels, De Queen, appointed to the Arkansas Higher Education Board for a term expiring May 1, 2018, replacing David Leech.

Pat Audirsch, Marianna, appointed to the Mississippi River Parkway Commission for a term expiring June 8, 2015, replacing Lois Boyd.

Jim Baker, Conway, appointed to the Arkansas Claims Commission for a term expiring Jan. 15, 2017, replacing Bishop Steven Arnold.

Charley Baxter, North Little Rock, reappointed to the Arkansas Development Finance Authority for a term expiring Jan. 14, 2017.

Aubrey Blackmon, Houston, reappointed to the Arkansas Beef Council for a term expiring March 30, 2016.

Shirley Bolden-Bruce, Little Rock, reappointed to the Arkansas Board of Architects, Landscape Architects and Interior Designers for a term expiring April 26, 2018.

Anthony Brooks, Little Rock, reappointed to the Arkansas Development Finance Authority for a term expiring Jan. 14, 2017.

Curt Calaway, Fayetteville, reappointed to the state Kidney Disease Commission for a term expiring Jan. 14, 2017.

Patty Cardin, El Dorado, appointed to the South Arkansas Community College board of trustees for a term expiring Dec. 31, 2018, replacing Sherrel Johnson.

Veronica Creer, El Dorado, reappointed to the South Arkansas Community College board of trustees for a term expiring Dec. 31, 2018.

Jamie Darling, Tuckerman, appointed to the Arkansas Humanities Council for a term expiring Dec. 31, 2015, replacing Clark Trim.

Harold Dean, Little Rock, appointed to the Social Work Licensing Board for a term expiring June 30, 2014, replacing Nancy Streit-Atkinson.

Stephen Donnelly, Elkins, appointed to the Arkansas Fair Housing Commission for a term expiring Feb. 1, 2016, replacing Shanna Allen.

Mike Ellis, Hot Springs, appointed to the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board for a term expiring Jan. 14, 2017, replacing Tony Ellis.

Roger Fitzgibbon Jr., Little Rock, reappointed to the Arkansas Independent Living Council for a term expiring Feb. 1, 2016.

Lynn Foster, Roland, reappointed to the Commission on Uniform State Laws for a term expiring April 30, 2017.

Lynn Hawkins, Lexa, appointed to the Arkansas Rural Development Commission for a term expiring Dec. 31, 2015, replacing Wayne Nichols.

Paulette Hill, Mountain Home, reappointed to the Arkansas Division of Volunteerism Advisory Council for a term expiring Jan. 7, 2016.

Robyn Horn, Camden, reappointed to the Arkansas Independent Living Council for a term expiring Feb. 1, 2016.

Bood Keathley, Danville, appointed to the Arkansas Rural Development Commission for a term expiring Dec. 31, 2017, replacing Tony Ferguson.

Judge Michael Loftin, El Dorado, reappointed to the Arkansas Waterways Commission for a term expiring Jan. 14, 2020.

Rajesh Mehta, Little Rock, appointed to the Arkansas Board of Architects, Landscape Architects, and Interior Designers for a term expiring April 26, 2018, replacing Cora Bradshaw.

Molly Miller, Little Rock, appointed to the Arkansas Division of Volunteerism Advisory Council for a term expiring Jan. 7, 2016, replacing James Brandenburg.

Julie Mills, Little Rock, appointed to the Arkansas Development Finance Authority for a term expiring Jan. 14, 2017, replacing Jerry Webster.

Carlos Nagel, Alma, appointed to the Boiler Advisory Board for a term expiring Jan. 14, 2017, replacing Bill McCoy.

Mary Lynn Nelson, Little Rock, appointed to the Arkansas Humanities Council for a term expiring Dec. 31, 2015, replacing Bettie Anne Mahony.

Glenn Priebe, Mountain Home, appointed to the Arkansas Rural Development Commission for a term expiring Dec. 31, 2017, replacing Dennis Donahou.

Dr. Peggy Sissel, Little Rock, appointed to the Arkansas Division of Volunteerism Advisory Council for a term expiring Jan. 7, 2016, replacing Angela Oxford.

James "Buddy" Smith III, Springfield, reappointed to the Arkansas Beef Council for a term expiring March 30, 2016.

Heather Stevens, Mountain View, appointed to the Arkansas Geographic Information Systems Board for a term expiring Aug. 1, 2015, replacing Preston Scroggin.

Allen Stewart, Mena, reappointed to the Arkansas Beef Council for a term expiring March 30, 2016.

Charlie Thomas, El Dorado, reappointed to the South Arkansas Community College board of trustees for a term expiring Dec. 31, 2018.

Susan Waggener, West Memphis, reappointed to the Arkansas Project Graduation Commission for a term expiring Aug. 20, 2013.

David Whatley, Texarkana, reappointed to the Child Welfare Agency Review Board for a term expiring March 1, 2017.

Elisa White, Little Rock, reappointed to the Commission on Uniform State Laws for a term expiring April 30, 2017.

To the Criminal Detention Facility Review Committee: Gary Grimes, Fort Smith, replacing Larry Murry, Judicial District 1; John Magee, Mountain Home, reappointment, Judicial District 14; Leon Myers, Mena, reappointment, Judicial District 18 West; for terms expiring Jan. 14, 2017.

To the state Rehabilitation Council: Martha Kay Asti, Little Rock, reappointed; Gregory Lawrence, Magnolia, reappointed; Eddie Miller, Little Rock, replacing Latisha McClendon; Martha Strother, North Little Rock, replacing Debbie Wooten; Debbie Wooten, McRae, replacing Mark Carson; for terms expiring Feb. 1, 2016.